

MOLOKA‘I CREEPER

(*Paroreomyza flammea*) Hawaiian name, Kaka-wahie

The Hawaiian name for this species, Kaka-wahie, means “to breakup firewood,” which describes the chipping call of this beautiful bird. The call has not been heard, nor has the bird been seen since 1963. It is now either extremely rare or extinct.

DISTRIBUTION: Reported to be common on both leeward and windward sides of Molokaʻi in the 1890s, the Molokaʻi Creeper was last sighted from the rainforest on the west rim of Pelekunu Valley on the Ohīʻalele Plateau

DESCRIPTION: The Molokaʻi Creeper is about 5 inches long and has a nearly straight bill. Males are a brilliant scarlet. Females are brown with some scarlet markings; also described as dark olive-brown, washed with orange. Juveniles resemble females.

VOICE: Call notes are “chip,” “chik,” “cherk,” and “sweet;” the song has not been described.

NESTING: Breeding biology is unknown. Nests were found in 1908, but the only description given was that the exterior of the nest was composed of moss. Nests of the Maui Creeper, constructed of leaves and moss, were found in ōhiʻa and kōlea trees more than 10 feet above the ground. The clutch size appears to be two eggs. A male Molokaʻi Creeper scales the trunk of an ōhiʻa.

DIET: The Molokaʻi Creeper forages for insects by creeping along large branches, often hanging upside down to feed. Perhaps, like the Maui Creeper, it also visits the canopy of ōhiʻa trees to sip nectar from lehua blossoms.

CONSERVATION NOTE: There are five species of creepers; the Kauaʻi and Hawaiʻi species are relatively common and belong to the same genus. The Maui, Molokaʻi and Oʻahu species belong to another genus. The Maui species is relatively common, but the Oʻahu and Molokaʻi Creepers are extremely rare or extinct.

The browsing activities of axis deer, pigs, and cattle have eliminated several thousand acres of ōhiʻa forests on east Molokaʻi. Axis deer were introduced as a gift to Kamehameha V in 1868. Little did the bearers of this gift, the Hawaiian consul in Hong Kong, know of the havoc the deer would wreak on the native forests and their inhabitants. In addition, avian diseases, transmitted by mosquitoes are suspected to have contributed to the Molokaʻi Creepers’ demise. Whether this rare bird has found refuge in the lush ōhiʻa forests high on the rugged slopes of east Molokaʻi is unknown.



A male Molokaʻi Creeper scales the trunk of an ōhiʻa.
—Painting by Sheryl Ives